

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #2424/01 1491218
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 291218Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9183
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 5984
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 3846
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2360
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7052
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1023
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4425
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0648
RHMFIISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 6789

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 002424

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/UAE, Syria/UK, South Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian Territories (5/26-29)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers reported the visit of Vice President Shara to the United Arab Emirates and his meeting with Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nhayan, UAE Deputy Prime Minister, which focused on recent developments in the region and bilateral relations.

Papers also reported the visit to Damascus of Richard Spring, Member of the British House of Commons and Member of the Administrative Board of the British-Syrian Association. Headlines reported Mr. Spring's meetings with Prime Minister Ottri, which tackled bilateral relations and the role of the British-Syrian Association in enhancing bilateral relations. During the meeting, Prime Minister Ottri underlined Syria's desire for a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with the land-for-peace formula and the related international resolutions. For his part, MP Spring said he appreciated Syria's position and active role to establish security and stability in the region. MP Spring also held talks with FM Mouallem, focusing on developments in Iraq, and Minister of information Dr. Mohsen Bilal, focusing on means of developing cooperation between Britain and Syria in all fields.

Papers also reported the Israeli assault against south Lebanon and featured a statement by President Lahoud stressing that "the Israeli aggression against Lebanon is an attempt to undermine security and stability in Lebanon; they want to bring us back to the atmosphere of insecurity in Lebanon." President Lahoud said, "the latest developments in Lebanon, starting from the assassination of Mahmoud Majzoub to the latest Israeli aggression against Lebanon, require full awareness and vigilance from all Lebanese parties. We should not let Israel realize its aggressive goals against us." Meanwhile, Speaker of the Lebanese parliament Nabih Berri said that "Israel is the real enemy of Lebanon, the Arab nation and all of humanity." He said that "Israel's aggressive plots can be faced by sticking to resistance and enhancing Lebanon's ties with the Arab countries, particularly Syria."

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Vice-President Shara discusses latest developments in the region with His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nhayan, UAE Deputy Prime Minister" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/29)

"Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Meqdad arrives in Kuala Lumpur heading an official delegation to represent Syria at the ministerial conference of the Non-Aligned Movement" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/29)

"Prime Minister Mohammed Ottri discusses cooperation ties between Syria and the United Kingdom with Richard Spring, Member of the British House of Commons and Member of the Administrative Board of the British-Syrian Association. Mr. Spring: Syria has an active role in establishing security and stability in the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/29)

"Foreign Minister Walid Al-Mou'allem holds talks in Beijing on latest developments in the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/29)

"Minister of Information Dr. Mohsen Bilal discusses with a delegation of the British-Syrian Association means of further developing cooperation between Britain and Syria in all fields. Bilal stresses that Syria has no problem with any country in the world, adding that Israeli occupation of Arab lands is the reason behind all the problems" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/28)

"Two Lebanese martyred, 6 wounded in an Israeli aggression against south Lebanon and Bekaa. The Lebanese resistance responds by a missile shelling, killing one Israeli soldier and injuring several others. Olmert unleashes threats" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/29)

"Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese commemorate the anniversary of liberating south Lebanon. Nasrallah Hizbollah SecGen thanks Syria by saying: The day of liberation is written in blood; no one can erase it.... Resorting to the UNSC and superpowers complicates matters in Lebanon. Berri Lebanese Speaker: Aggravating tension with Syria contradicts our interests" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/26)

"Extensive Lebanese denunciation of the government cancellation of the Liberation Day holiday. Calls for maintaining resistance and enhancing relations with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/27)

"The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) in Lebanon: UNSC Resolution 1680 is a dangerous precedent that violates sovereignty of countries" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/29)

"A US helicopter crashes in al-Anbar. Italy reduces its forces as a prelude to withdrawal from Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/28)

"Leader of the Islamic Jihad movement is assassinated in Sidon. Israeli fingerprints on the crime" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/27)

"Hamas approves 90% of the prisoners' initiative and dismantles interior force. At least 4 martyrs in the Israeli bombardment of Beit Lahia" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/27)

"Bush and Blair acknowledge mistakes in Iraq and reject scheduling pullout. Scores of Iraqis killed and injured in blasts, shootings in Baghdad" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/27)

"Sessions of the Palestinian dialogue kick off. Hamas: The Palestinian people will not make concessions" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/26)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Why Did They Disappear?"

Ezzeddin Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/28): "Those Lebanese who say that Syria, not Israel, is Lebanon's enemy have remained silent about the assassination of the Islamic Jihad official in Sidon, southern Lebanon, so as to avoid talking about Lebanon's real enemy, Israel....

"These Lebanese are Israeli tools.... While Israel violates Lebanese sovereignty around the clock, these Lebanese see no problem, and indeed call for disarming the resistance.... This is not the first time that Israel has carried out an assassination in Lebanon.... Every nationalist Lebanese figure is a target for Israel, and every balanced Lebanese position is a target for Israel....

"What happened in Sidon two days ago calls for full vigilance and high alert. It requires that honorable Lebanese do everything in their capacity to defend the national resistance and denounce the discordant voices that call for disarming it. Resistance means power and national sovereignty. It means defeat for Israel, for its plans against Lebanon, and for those who mortgage themselves to Israel's will in Lebanon, those who claim, contrary to history and geography, that Syria, not Israel, is Lebanon's enemy."

"Confessions Are Insufficient"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/28): "US President George Bush and British Prime

Minister Tony Blair have acknowledged that they made mistakes in Iraq.... The two leaders made the admission while they are in their worst shape, as if they are asking for forgiveness and hoping that their popularity rating, which dropped to unprecedented lows, might improve....

"Blair these days is looking for anything that will save him from a political fall and a resounding defeat and help him regain his lost popularity....

"Admitting to making mistakes in the war, whether under the pressure of politics or out of a genuine conviction, is insufficient to improve the image of Bush and Blair and their countries. If they really want reconciliation with themselves and with the international community, then the natural introduction is to withdraw immediately from Iraq, apologize to the country, compensate Iraq and the Iraqis, stop interfering in the affairs of sovereign states, and abide by international law and the UN Charter. Otherwise, a fate similar to the fate of Aznar and Berlusconi awaits Bush and Blair."

"No Alternative for the Palestinian National Dialogue"

Muhammad al-Khadir, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, commented (5/28): "Palestinians have no option other than national dialogue. Remaining differences will be natural as long as everyone agrees on the need to preserve national unity and maintain the resistance as long as the occupation continues....

"The challenge that Palestinians are currently facing, which calls for an expanded domestic dialogue, is not linked to the rivalry between Fatah and HAMAS after the latter's victory in the legislative elections. Rather, the challenge proceeds from a plan, on which countries and intelligence agencies are constantly working, to place various obstacles in the way of the elected Palestinian government, from economic siege and the attempt to create a gulf between the Palestinians and their elected government to the fabrication of infighting. Therefore,

the dialogue must produce clear results reaffirming Palestinian national principles for the sake of which Palestinians have offered thousands of martyrs...."

"Alliance of the Axis of Evil"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/27): "Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have visited Washington recently.... President Bush made pathetic and miserable statements during the press conferences following his meetings with his strongest two allies....

"Olmert obtained full American support for Israel and a Congressional decision legitimizing the killing of Palestinians through siege and starvation.... President Bush particularly underlined the Jewish state and announced beyond any doubt that he is an active preacher for Zionism.... This came as no surprise, because Bush's conduct and policies prove this fact and reveal the reasons behind his wars on the Arab and Islamic nations, wars that he has described as crusades....

"As for the visit of British PM Blair, Bush's partner in the aggression on Iraq and the Arab nation, Blair and Bush decided to continue the occupation of Iraq and to level threats against Iran....

"What concerns us in the two visits and the two press conferences is that the governments of Bush, Blair, and Olmert send fiery messages to Arabs and Muslims, showing more loyalty to international Zionism and Israel than to the domestic and national interests of the United States and Great Britain, and glorifying wars, killing, bloodshed, and terrorism. People already knew this, but they still needed additional proof that this vicious trio is hostile and that the extremist rightist fundamentalist ideologies have the same objectives against humanity. This being the case, don't we have the right to call this trio 'the alliance of the axis of evil'?"

Seche